

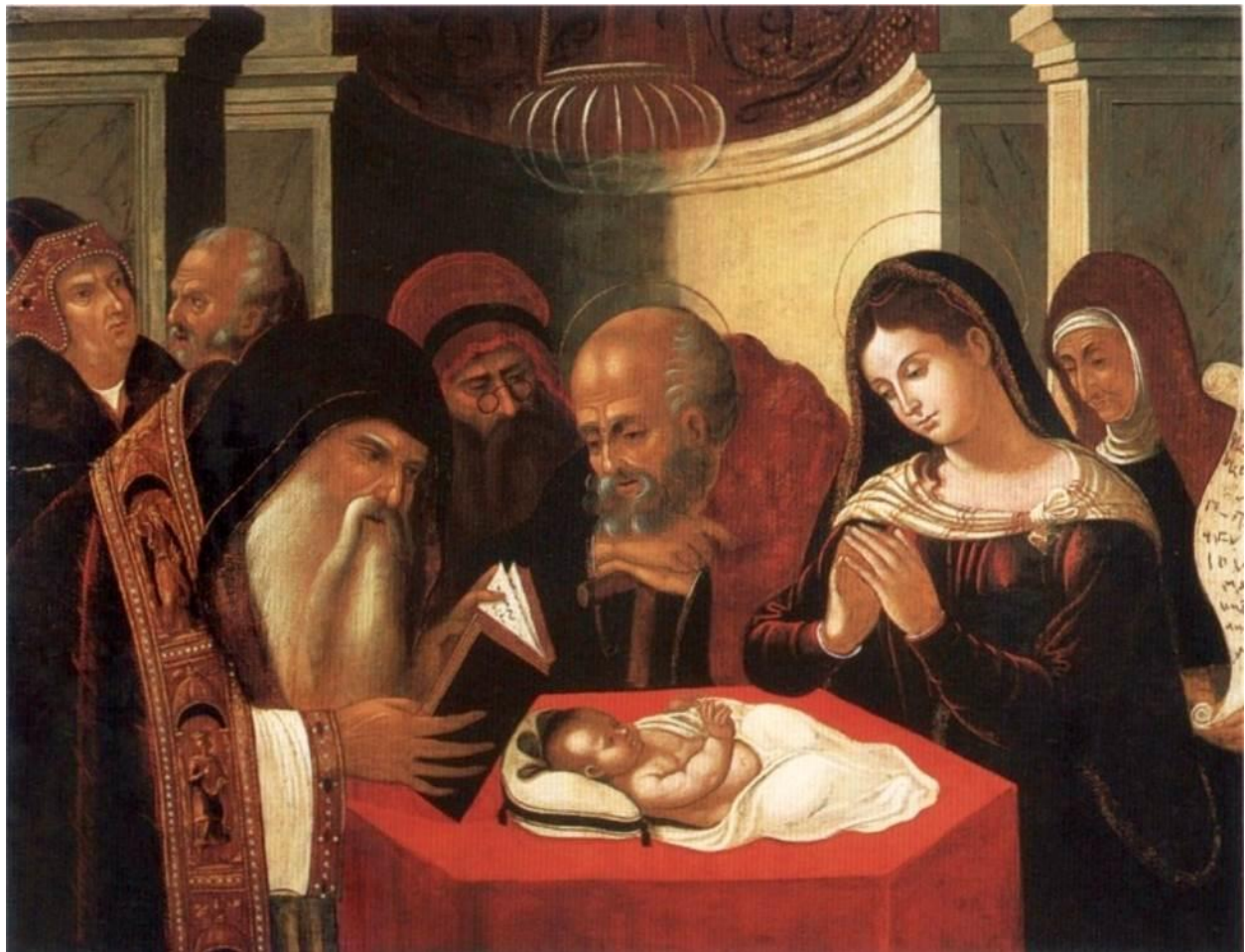


Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Presentation of the Lord | Year A



The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple by Bellini



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

*THE PRAYER,
O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)*

O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of the Lord which occurs forty days after the Nativity of Jesus and is also known as Candlemas day.
- ▶ Today's liturgy includes the blessing and procession of candles.
- ▶ Even though this feast was once referred to as the Purification of Mary, Jesus is the focus in today's feast and today's gospel.
- ▶ Women were considered unclean for forty days after delivering a male child and eighty days after a female child.
- ▶ Mothers were required by law to go to the temple and offer the priest a sin offering—a lamb and a young pigeon or turtledove or if poor, two turtledoves. The offering would render them clean again.
- ▶ Mary was following her legal responsibility when she presented Jesus to the temple.
- ▶ First-born male children belonged to the Lord (Ex. 13. 2) and were to be taken to the temple so the parents could ransom them back with money.
- ▶ The origin of the feast can be dated to the fifth century. The feast looks back to the Incarnation and forward to the Paschal Sacrifice of Jesus.
- ▶ The procession was a re-appropriation of the pagan celebration of expiation that occurred every five years in the month of February.
- ▶ The procession with candles is a reminder that Jesus' Life and Light was extended to the gentiles. (Lk. 2:32).
- ▶ By mid eighth century the feast was referred to as the "Purification of Blessed Virgin Mary". It was changed in 1969
- ▶ The revised calendar changed the focus of the feast from Mary to Jesus and changed the name in 1969 to capture the original intent of the feast.
- ▶ The blessing of candles dates back to around 1,000 in Gaul.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Malachi 3, 1-4

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The oracle of Malachi heralds future arrival of the "messenger of the covenant".
- ▶ The expected messenger will come bringing judgment.
- ▶ When the messenger arrives on that great and awe-filled day of the Lord, he will purify the people.
- ▶ Even though the people were returned and restored from exile and the Temple was rebuilt, the people's response was anything but faith-filled or enthusiastic.
- ▶ Woe to those who enjoyed prosperity during the exile while others suffered and languished. Those who suffered would enjoy vindication.
- ▶ This feast of the Lord is understood as a fulfillment of Malachi's prophetic words.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What is the challenge for us in light of the fact that the messenger has already arrived?
- ▶ What does the judgment in this text have to do with us today?
- ▶ Who would be considered among the group that prospered and who would be among those who were vindicated in our culture today? What are the implications for our Christian life?

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

The author of Hebrews extols the high priesthood of Jesus.

- ▶ The author of Hebrews proclaimed Jesus the new High Priest.
- ▶ Jesus, the High Priest came to establish a new covenant with God's people.
- ▶ Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, rendering all other sacrifices of the old covenant obsolete.
- ▶ Since Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice, human beings were no longer required to offer sacrifice in atonement for their sins—Jesus freely forgave the sins of humanity through the sacrifice of the cross.
- ▶ In so doing, the human race was reconciled with God. They were “at-one” (at-one-ment-atonement) with him.
- ▶ Jesus' free offering of his life accomplished the salvation of humanity.
- ▶ Jesus' offered his life in total submission to God and in faithful obedience to God's will.
- ▶ As a result of so great a sacrifice human beings now share in Jesus' resurrection and have gained access to eternal life with God.
- ▶ Even though we will experience human death, we will also now experience everlasting life.
- ▶ Jesus' suffering was real; he was both human and divine. He suffered the pain of crucifixion as would any other human being—it was horrific torture.
- ▶ Jesus now, however, stands in solidarity with human beings who suffer as he suffered.
- ▶ Jesus is an advocate in the face of human suffering.
- ▶ Jesus prays that we will be strengthened in the face of pain, trial, torture and all forms of human suffering.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Have you or anyone you know ever been consoled in the face of suffering or the trials in your life?
- ▶ What does that experience teach you about Jesus' response to our suffering?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that Jesus is our advocate in the face of human suffering?
- ▶ Do you really believe that Jesus' paid the price and that we do not have to atone for our own sins? What are the implications of this truth?

Gospel: Luke 2: 22-40

Mary and Joseph present Jesus to the Temple as required by Law.

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

(Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL

- ▶ There is more going on in today's Gospel than meets the eye.
- ▶ Jesus is not simply presented in the Temple.
- ▶ Today's Gospel is a proclamation of the salvation Jesus would one day accomplish by his death and resurrection.
- ▶ The Law and the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the fulfillment of God's mission for the human race—today's Gospel is the official herald of that long awaited promise and covenant.
- ▶ Jesus, even as a mere babe in this Temple encounter, was obedient by submitting to the Law by following the proscription that first born males be presented to the Temple and offered to God.
- ▶ Simeon is a symbol of the faithful people of Israel.
- ▶ He knew well what was unfolding before him. He could see the long awaited Light finally dawning on the human stage.

- ▶ Simeon recalled the words of the prophets in which they heralded the universal message of salvation for the *ENTIRE* world, embodied now in this babe being presented to God in the Temple.
- ▶ No wonder Simeon was in amazement—he witnessed firsthand what had long been proclaimed.
- ▶ The universal mission of God included all people—not just the chosen people of Israel.
- ▶ Inclusive though the mission is, it would be fraught with danger; it would not be easy.
- ▶ Believers will experience the same rejection Christ experienced.
- ▶ Simeon reminds readers then and now that we can expect division as a result of our faith in Christ
- ▶ Mary is upheld as one like us who listened to the Lord’s command, obeyed it and then marveled at God’s work of salvation.
- ▶ She is an example to us. We too are to hear God’s word and as St. James exhorts us, we are called “to be hearers and doers of the word”.
- ▶ Like Mary, we too will marvel at the great works of God in our life.
- ▶ This feast is a manifestation feast—an encounter with God. The Eastern Church calls this a Feast of Encounter.
- ▶ When we celebrate this liturgy, listen to these sacred Scriptures, we too encounter the *One Who Came to Save the World from Sin*.
- ▶ We can do no less than become transformed in and through Christ and his dawning Light.
- ▶ We can do no less than live lives dedicated to God in obedience to his will for our lives.
- ▶ We can do no less than marvel that Jesus, Light of the World, has come to save ALL people.
- ▶ We can do no less than go out and preach the Good News of salvation to ALL God’s people.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way, if any does this gospel have anything to do with your life at this time in your life?
- ▶ When you consider your own life, in what way has Jesus' saved you? What does it mean to you when you say that you are saved?
- ▶ How do you feel about Simeon's reminder that this mission will not be easy and that there will be division? Have you ever experienced such division?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced your commitment to Christ as "not easy?" Explain.
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel for your life as a disciple of Jesus?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

THE PRAYER, O LORD MY GOD

(By Saint Anselm.)

O Lord my God.

*Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

APPENDIX

► Have you ever experienced your commitment to Christ as “not easy?” Explain.

I often pray that God mold and shape me into the person he wants me to be, but try though I may, I seem to fall back into the same old patterns of sin. I need a Savior. The ego—my ego—is so strong that it is difficult to discern whether my heart is pure, my motives clean and my commitment to Christ is what it should be.

I often find myself distracted about worldly considerations. I find myself on the wrong track when I give in to gossip, materialism and the daily grind of living. I often feel guilty that I am not living up to the ideal of abandoning my life to God’s life, God’s light and God’s love.

It is very easy to do the Lord’s work and subliminally believe in one’s own sense of entitlement. Today’s liturgy is a reminder that that salvation is not something to which we are entitled. It is pure gift. We cannot earn it on our own; we can only achieve it with the help of God. It is impossible to achieve on our own.

I often find myself arguing with God over what I perceive to be unanswered prayers. What has become Savior in my life is my dream and obsessive desire for peace, serenity and an illness-free existence for my loved ones.

I often pray and tell God what he needs to do to insure my peace and just when I think I have relinquished control of my life to him, I find myself telling God how I want to be saved.

I often feel that perhaps God asks too much, when in fact all God wants is my heart and to daily, minute by minute become conscious of his life that dwells within me. Very often I think the responsibility is all mine—I take on the role of Savior, forgetting that I already have one and it is NOT me; it is Christ the Lord.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from the celebration of the liturgy:

Kingdom of God

Salvation/Soteriology

Mary Model for the Church

Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and

Purgatory.

Creed

Scripture and Revelation I or II

Liturgical Year

Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today's Gospel heralds the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth. When Simeon affirms the universal message of salvation for the entire world, we are reminded that we too are called to help establish the Kingdom Jesus inaugurated in today's Gospel. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Today's Gospel heralds the inauguration of God's universal plan of salvation for the entire world—not just the chosen people of Israel. When Simeon affirms the fulfillment of God's plan unfolding before him, we are reminded that we too are heirs of that saving message and we are called to help establish the Kingdom Jesus inaugurated in today's Gospel. Salvation is a free gift. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

Mary is heralded as an icon of faithful obedience to the will of God when she presents Jesus, the first-born male to the Temple. The Law required first born males to be offered to God for God's service to the Temple. Mary was a willing, obedient servant of God. She is a reminder that we too are called to faithful servanthood. We remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

No discussion of salvation would be complete without a discussion about what is meant by eternal life. The universal message of salvation is heralded by Simeon in today's Gospel. Just what does it mean to be saved? What are the implications for the afterlife? Where do people "go" who are not saved? Today's Gospel begs the question. The reign of God is not what we expect it to be. Simeon reminds us that it is not easy. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on **ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.**

CREED

Simeon heralds a universal message of salvation proclaimed by the prophets of old. He affirms a living creed—what faithful people believe about God and God's salvation. Jesus' saving mission was to establish his kingdom and call people to faith in him and his work. Today's liturgy is a good opportunity to reflect upon what we believe about God, salvation and Jesus. Simeon's proclamation is thus a good springboard for focusing our attention on the Christian **CREED.**

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus is the revelation of God. Jesus teaches us the mind and heart of God and his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth as we await the kingdom yet to come. Today's Gospel heralds the universal message of salvation and God's revelation to the world proclaimed throughout sacred Scripture. God's revelation continues in God's revealed, holy word. It is fitting that we focus our attention today on **SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.**

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the **LITURGICAL YEAR.**

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.

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